

Session XI 1:45-3:15

11.A Queer and Intersectional Imaginings (Colonial East)

Aaron Hammes, John Jay College, “A Pyramid of Queer and Trans Counter Utopias”

It has been almost twenty years since Lee Edelman’s *No Future* manifesto emerged as a shot across the bow of the cis/heteronormative future of The Child, and nearly fifteen since José Esteban Muñoz’s ruminations on queer futurity in *Cruising Utopia*. More recently, Virignie Despentes writes of former paramour Paul B Preciado’s desire for a “utopian gender,” adding another wrinkle to the prospects for sex-gender dissidents to imagine a future in which their lives and livelihoods escape state surveillance, phobic publics, and legal obstacles to self-determination. This presentation attempts to craft a utopian pyramid, first comparing the rhetorics of *No Future*, *Cruising Utopia*, and Preciado’s *Apartment on Uranus* for some versions of still-emergent and nascent utopian knowledge projects. Then, another triangle, this one of utopian political projects: police/prison abolition, sex work decriminalization/destigmatization, and visions of queer/trans liberation. I seek to wonder with the other gathered utopians: what are the shared discursive strategies and prospects for demanding everything as curative for legislative and destigmatizing “victories” which are so quickly and easily revoked? How do struggles for queer and trans liberation and minoritarian self-determination necessarily implicate anti-carceral logics, not least around the highly sex-gendered, classed, and racialized labor of the sex trades? Finally, how do abolitionist logics of anti-reformist reform, transformative justice, and safety over security intertwine the queer and queered futures gestured toward, imagined by, and divined from Edelman, Muñoz, and Preciado?

Josephine Holland, University of Richmond, “Emerging Online Community Building, World-Making, and the Utopian Impulse in Queer Speculative Podcasts”

This paper examines the “queer processes” of producing new media speculative fiction and the online community building that surrounds the creation process. There is something creatively rich in this intersection of speculation, internet-based new media, and queer content, that sparks a utopian impulse. This utopian impulse materializes in the radically queer imagined worlds and in the simultaneous vibrant queer online community formation. Engaging in and with queer worldmaking, disidentification, and alternative futurisms turn imaginative practices into resistant ones: you cannot overturn oppressive systems if you cannot imagine a world without them. Queer speculative podcasts not only imagine queer utopian worlds but generate them in online community spaces. In examining several queer speculative podcasts using digital humanities methods and subsequent critical analysis, I will identify the actual narrative touchstones and queer collaborative creative processes that encourage a community response of queer identity formation in an emerging virtual “third space.” While the particular intersection of these topics does not have a significant previous scholarship, this research is grounded in the work of José Esteban Muñoz, Alexis Lothian, and Andrew Bottomley, and will draw from the fields of queer theory, speculative studies and science fiction studies, fan studies, internet studies, and utopian studies. Overall, this work

attempts to locate the space between the speculative “no place” of abstract utopias, the educated hope and “here and now” of concrete utopias, and the “then and there” queer futurity of Muñoz within the context of contemporary online culture and media.

11. B. Solarpunk Futures: A Workshop for Utopian Remembrance (Colonial West)

Solarpunk Futures: A Workshop for Utopian Remembrance utilizes the artist's table-top game, *Solarpunk Futures*, to engage attendees of the 2022 Society for Utopian Conference in a process of visionary social storytelling around the collective struggle required to win our utopia. The game employs backcasting in a “Festival of Remembrance,” whereby *Assemblies for the Future* (groups of 1-8 players) play for 45 minutes from the perspective of a future utopia in which they collectively “remember” how their *Ancestors* utilized *Tools* and *Values* to overcome a real-world *Challenge*. *Assemblies* will report back on the form of their utopian scenarios, insights gained along the way, and how their experiences might inform their present-day actions.

11.C. Utopian Effects/Dystopian Pleasures: A Roundtable Discussion (Citadel South)

This panel discussion will consider the insights and impact of Peter Fitting’s utopian scholarship, to mark last year’s publication of *Utopian Effects, Dystopian Pleasures*, vol. 21 in the Ralahine Utopian Studies Series. In this collection of essays written over a span of three decades (1979-2009), Fitting touches on an impressive range of utopian topics: from gender politics, urban planning, cinema, and technology to right-wing utopias, ideological closure, and the crucial question of how to transform utopian visions into social practice. Together, these writings provide an unprecedented glimpse into the changing currents of utopian thought and expression, as well as the formation of both Utopian and Science Fiction Studies as scholarly fields in their own right, developments in which Fitting has been instrumental.

Chair: Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor

Participants:

Peter Fitting, University of Toronto

Lyman Tower Sargent, University of Missouri-St. Louis

Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor, Penn State University

Peter Marks, University of Sydney

Session XII 3:30-4:45

12.A. Nourishing Utopia (Colonial East)

Darrell Varga, NSCAD University (Nova Scotia College of Art and Design), “Making Bread and Telling Stories: *Bread in the Bones*”

Bertolt Brecht insisted that before we can act politically, we need a full stomach since social control stems from control over the food system. Hunger breeds desperation, but a full stomach can lead just as much to apathy as to progressive action. The cliché: “an army runs on its stomach” has also been said of a motion picture crew, but bread feeds a fascist army just as well as it feeds the counter-revolutionary forces, and the same can be said for art and artists. What, then, do we do with the loaf of bread? Eat it, certainly, but can it also nurture a perspective on life and love, on loss and struggle? Released in 2020, my feature documentary film *Bread in the Bones*, takes the simple loaf of bread as a starting point for storytelling and with the question of how bread, from The French Revolution to the Arab Spring, has been a witness, if not a catalyst, to movements for social change. This simple food, a mix of flour, water, and salt, provides nourishment for the body and also feeds our collective desire for a connection to culture and community. In the experience of these stories, we are invited to contemplate our relationship to food and to each other, and that contemplation provides the potential for action. This conference presentation examines these ideas through a discussion of the making of this film, illustrated with excerpts from the project. To see the trailer for the film: <https://vimeo.com/563748915>

Victoria Wolcott, University of Buffalo, “Abundance in a Time of Scarcity: Father Divine’s Peace Mission and Utopian Solutions to Economic Crises”

Father Divine’s Peace Mission was the most successful utopian community in twentieth-century America. During the devastating economic crisis of the Great Depression the Peace Mission offered its followers and beleaguered city dwellers free lavish banquets and low-cost goods at cooperative stores. By the late 1930s the Peace Mission had become the largest realty holder in Harlem and had extensions in twenty-six states. In its rural and coastal resorts Black and white vacationers could rest and relax in interracial settings for a minimal fee. And Divinites boasted of their good mental and physical health as they abstained from alcohol and cigarettes, had access to bountiful healthy food, and no longer feared poverty and oppression. A decade later, as the United States emerged from World War II a more prosperous and powerful nation, the Father Divine movement had considerable less appeal and began a slow decline over the course of the next few decades. In 2022 many of us are reconsidering the importance of utopian thinking and practice as we navigate multiple crises of disease, war, climate change, and racial inequality. This is an opportune moment to consider how the Great Depression offered an opening for Father Divine’s utopian experiment, as well as socialist communities such as California’s Utopian Society of America. The unmaking of the political, social, and economic world during the 1930s allowed Divinites the opportunity to remake a new world. A world of abundance in the midst of scarcity.

12.B. Utopia and Protest in Chile (Colonial West)

Daniel Sarkela, University of Florida, “La vida volverá- reconstructing Chilean Utopia”

In the wake of several months of social mobilization and protests in Chile, the Covid-19 pandemic put a halt to all demonstrations due to the public health risks and high infection rates. The protests sought to end police brutality, economic inequality, and rewrite any policies instituted by the Pinochet dictatorship 30 years earlier. These aims were an attempt to create a new and just society, free from the past’s remnants of injustice and corruption. While the physical gatherings had taken a hiatus, the fight carried on in the digital sphere as artists and musicians continued to make creative works dedicated to bettering society and working towards a brighter future. Chilean music group “Illapu” is no stranger to protest music and has been active since the Salvador Allende years before the 1973 coup. In June of 2021, the group released a single titled “La vida volverá” (Life will return) to spread their hopeful optimism in the face of the pandemic, promising a better tomorrow. This paper will use an interdisciplinary approach using musical analysis, social movement theory and grounded utopian movement theory to analyze this song within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the broader scope of Chile’s history. The song is a manifestation of an attempted remaking of the utopia dreamed of by the Allende administration after the efforts of the Pinochet dictatorship to unmake their policies.

Eunice Rojas, Furman University, “Until Dignity Becomes Tradition: The Dawn of a New Utopia in the Songs of Chile’s 2019 Social Upheaval”

On October 18, 2019, simmering student protests in Chile over a modest metro fare hike boiled over into a massive social upheaval that resulted in the destruction of public transit stations, burning street barricades, and violent confrontations between protesters and police. The protests quickly evolved into much broader critiques of social inequities attributed to the effects of the neoliberal economic system installed under the 1973-1990 Augusto Pinochet dictatorship and President Sebastián Piñera’s heavy-handed management of the crisis. Thirty years earlier Pinochet’s 1973 coup had ended the government of Salvador Allende, the world’s first democratically-elected Marxist. Once in power, Pinochet rolled back Allende’s socialist program and brought in a set of Chilean economists educated under Milton Friedman to transform the nation’s economy. Often touted as the “Chilean Miracle,” the nation’s free market economy and its privatization of education, health care, pensions, and natural resources was identified by many in the 2019 protests as the root cause of systemic social inequalities. Within days of the start of the upheaval, social media, street art, and songs worked to spread messages that equated Piñera with Pinochet and the neoliberal system as lingering vestiges of a dictatorship that had ended nearly three decades before. In their work on religion and politics in Latin America, Horacio Cerutti and Carlos Mondragón posit the idea of utopia as a space of social resistance. Similarly, Marxist-Humanist Eugene Gogol begins his dialectical examination of the concept of utopia within Latin American social movements by drawing on Gustavo Gutiérrez’s liberation theology definition of utopia “as a historically rooted denunciation of the present that compels action toward a future new

society.” This paper examines songs written, recorded, and released during the 2019 social upheaval that present a utopic conception of Chilean protesters denouncing the social conditions brought about by a government committed to neoliberalism. The condemnation is accompanied by the hope of ushering in a future new society based on the idea of dignity. The songs examined include “30 pesos” by Desmak, “Soy dignidad” by Trez3, “Negro matapacos” by Sr. Soya, and the 2019 version of Víctor Jara’s “El derecho de vivir en paz,” with lyrics rewritten for the social crisis by many of Chile’s contemporary pop artists.

Session XIII 5:00-6:30

13. A. Global Neoliberalism and the British Dystopia II (Colonial East)

Eric Smith, The University of Alabama in Huntsville, “Future Perfect and the Vanishing Present: ‘The Great Circularity’ and Anti-Utopianism in Mukherjee’s *The Lives of Others*”

In a manner the New York Times compares to Tolstoy, Neel Mukherjee’s Booker Prize short-listed *The Lives of Others* (2014) executes an expansive and unsparing critical anatomy of late twentieth-century Indian social conflict anchored by the extended family saga. If Tolstoy aligns with the traditional patriarchal family, Mukherjee’s commodious multi-generational tale seems, as Nivedita Majumdar observes, “invested in exposing a particularly dark underside of familial life.” Majumdar adds, “Commonplace matters of illicit romance, sibling rivalry, maternal broken hearts, envious and plotting sisters-in-law, deceitful brothers, and anguished children constitute the multigenerational saga”—a litany to which I would add exploitation, rape, fraud, theft, false incrimination, vengeance murder, suicide, sadism, and coprophilia. The limitation of Mukherjee’s family is therefore less to be found in any Tolstoian sentimentality than in the emphatic suggestion that a natural predisposition to corruption, frangibility, and moral degradation informs and fatally restrains any effort to transcend these innate limitations, which, like the original sins of inheritance, are revisited upon one generation after another. This voiding of the present as a space of possibility is consistently reinforced by the narrative’s use of the future perfect tense and the recurrent theme of what the Naxalite revolutionary, Supratik, calls “The Great Circularity,” a cosmic and moral gravitational field that arrests temporality and nullifies the labors of history. Considering these features in relation to what I identify as the novel’s Orwellian hypotext, I argue that the internationally celebrated *The Lives of Others* is a novel with both naturalist and distinctly anti-utopian proclivities.

Phillip Wegner, University of Florida, “A Future Worthy of Her Spirit: Neoliberal Dystopia in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Klara and the Sun*”

In an interview following the publication of *Klara and the Sun* (2021), Nobel laureate Kazuo Ishiguro observes that “he is unusual among his literary contemporaries in having attended a state grammar school and one of the then-new campus universities.” This observation comes in the midst of a discussion of “literary silos” and especially the persistent distinction between

serious literary and genre fiction. Ishiguro's background gives him a sharp eye to the importance of education. Moreover, the inequities of class stratification have long been central in his work. In this paper, I explore the dystopian vision of the university in *Klara and the Sun*. All of Ishiguro's most well-known novels—*The Remains of the Day* (1988), *Never Let Me Go* (2005), and *Klara and the Sun*—can be read as dystopias, located respectively in the past, an alternate present, and the near future. All three deploy a first-person perspective to cognitively estrange the realities of our neoliberal world. Together these three novels elaborate a critical portrait of the undermining of the mechanisms of class mobility in the post-WWII welfare state and the rise of a stratified global society. In particular, Ishiguro focuses in *Klara and the Sun* on the devastating effects on families, parents, and children, as well as society as a whole, of the dismantling in our present of one of the greatest achievements of the post-war dispensation: the modern university. In the end, Ishiguro shows how this development represents a profound threat to the very future of democracy itself.

13.B. First Book Panel (Colonial West)

The First Book Celebration Roundtable brings together first-time authors of books in the field of utopian studies. It serves as a means of celebration of a milestone, as well as facilitates a conversation among roundtable members and their audience on current subjects in book-length inquiries in the field. In this, the first annual First Book Celebration Roundtable, the discipline overwhelmingly represented is literary studies. All three roundtable members are literary studies scholars who investigate the utopian (or dystopian) impulse in narrative in a variety of ways and during a variety of historical periods. For instance, Daniel Dimassa traces the influence of Dante on Germanic romantic writing, both of which – Dante and the German romantics – drew upon utopian ideals to create a mythology of German cultural identity. Similarly, Stephanie Peebles Tavera excavates how, later in the century and across the pond, the utopian impulse would also inform women writers of medical fiction in their attempt to simultaneously critique medico-legal narratives of the female body and offer an alternative history and practice of women's reproductive health. Dimassa's and Peebles Tavera's findings may not be wholly surprising given the popularity of utopianism throughout the long nineteenth century. Rounding out the discussion is Anne Stewart's study of the "angry planet" in decolonial and dystopian literature, which explores how a long-term commitment to any political imaginary, whether cultural, medical, or industrial, can be dangerous. Whether the utopian impulse propels German romanticists, nineteenth-century American writers, or contemporary authors of environmental literature, it is clear that the act of writing to create cultural change hinges upon utopianism's penchant for hope as well as finds utopianism's narrative structure of critique and reform as a useful tool for projects of identity formation.

Daniel Dimassa, *Dante in Deutschland: An Itinerary of Romantic Myth* (Bucknell 2022), <https://www.rutgersuniversitypress.org/bucknell/dante-in-deutschland/9781684484188/>

Stephanie Peebles Tavera, Author of *(P)rescription Narratives: Feminist Medical Fiction and the Failure of American Censorship* (Edinburgh UP, 2022), <https://edinburghuniversitypress.com/book-p-rescription-narratives.html>

Anne Stewart, *Angry Plant: Decolonial Fiction and the American Third World* (University of Minnesota Press, 2022), <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/angry-planet>